

How to Recruit Channel Partners

10 Strategies from Channel Leaders to Recruit Partners that Produce

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+ Recruiting the right channel partners can deliver significant rewards, not the least of which is the opportunity to create and fuel a powerful engine for growth.

Yet therein lies the rub.

First, you have to find the right partners. And then you have to recruit them amid serious competition from other companies that also want those partners. And when you get through all that, you have to keep them engaged and working for you in a marketplace awash in hyper evolution.

How to Recruit Channel Partners: Advice from Channel Leaders

To identify best practices for navigating that complex process, Zift Solutions talked with eight proven channel leaders with varied professional backgrounds about their experiences. Together, they've built and sold agencies (and master agencies), led large global channel operations, successfully developed programs at "channel-first" companies, and much more. Here are the Top 10 channel partner recruitment tips they shared with us.

1 Make It About the Channel Partner, Not Your Company and Its Products

Channel leader commitment runs deeper than just building strong pre- and post-sales support — they strive to understand the true business challenges of their partners.

Dave Beagle, head of channels for Ooma (a provider of cloud-based voice and collaboration solutions), recommends an easy-to-remember "FIST" management strategy: Place an acute focus on the financial benefit to the partner, the integrity of your organization, the sincerity of your team, and transparency in communication.

2 Develop "Ideal Channel Partner" Profiles in Advance

Recognizing that all partners are not created equally, knowing how to screen for the right partners can save you a lot of headaches and wasted investment.

Alignment is a "biggie": If the target partner organization has aligned sales, marketing, provisioning and support, then they can act as a natural extension to one another. And it's important to recruit partners who are confident in the profile of their own customers.

3 Don't Overlook the Soft Parts of Partner Profiling

Profiling potential partners is both an art and a science. So metrics alone won't tell a complete story. Analyzing a potential partner's culture, values, work ethic and mindset toward collaboration are critically important in identifying which partners to target.

4 Find New Partners by "Fishing Where the Fish Are"

Your potential partners attend conferences, read industry publications like CRN and Channel Partners, listen to podcasts, attend webinars, participate in LinkedIn groups — you name it. Just as channel partners with vertical industry expertise meet their customers where they gather, you need to build your brand, develop your leads and build your community where your partners meet.

5 Work with Distributors and Master Agents to Reach Top-Performing Sales Partners

Master agents and other distributors can bring a lot of value to the table, including access to top-performing sales partners. (Plus, they help to manage commissions, partner service inquiries and training on your company's solutions.) Yet they also can be gatekeepers, ensuring that only vendors offering the best channel agreements, service performance and customer experience get access to their best sales agents. Make sure that you've checked all the boxes.

Obviously, a partner who comes to you with a deal ready to go seems like a good channel partner, but it doesn't come with a promise that they will have a second, third or fourth deal to bring you in the future. Most do not. By proactively profiling what [an ideal] channel partner looks like . . . you can have a much better understanding of what to expect and which partners you would want to invest in.

Dina Moskowitz
Founder & CEO ■ SaaSMAX

6 You Snooze, You Lose – Follow Up with Leads Quickly

A reliable channel partner can be a gift that keeps on giving. Prospective partners you talk with may enjoy being the belles of the ball at a busy industry conference, but their many suitors quickly become a blur. That's why you need to be in their first wave of follow-ups. Follow up a week later and you'll already way behind in a critical battle for limited time and attention.

7 Demonstrate How You Add Value to Your Sales Partners

Focusing on the unusual value you can offer partners can pique partners' interest and help you hedge against the "me-too" trap of trying to

convince them to displace their current providers by engaging in SPIFF and commission wars for bread-and-butter product sales. Being the highest bidder isn't a winning long-term channel strategy, after all; it only works until a better offer comes along and attracts partners who are more concerned about their bank accounts than their customer accounts.

8 Prioritize Responsiveness to Build Trust and Keep Partners Engaged in Selling Your Services

The faster your sales support operations can quote services, or your channel account managers can resolve issues for your partners and their clients, the more trust you build in the relationship. That's because you make your partners look good to their customers and reduce their workload while you do it.

9 Assess, Assess, Assess

Assessment is vital to building and maintaining a strong channel partner recruitment and engagement. Detailed quarterly business reviews can help you test your partner profiles to make sure they're performing as expected. Periodic reviews also can help you identify partners that are not engaging or that may have been poached by your competitors.

10 Know When to Say "No" to New or Further Investment in a Sales Partner

Depending on the length of your sales cycle, you're taking a six- to twelve-month bet that the financial, human and opportunity cost of recruiting a partner will pay off. So use your best-fit partners to model an ideal partner profile — and stick to it. Don't be afraid to tell a prospective partner "no." And if a partner is not engaged, not performing and slow to respond to your outreach or uninterested in opportunities you provide to up their game, focus your resources elsewhere.

While there's no copy-and-paste method for finding the right partners, keeping these tips in mind while developing your channel partner recruitment strategy can set you on the right path. Capturing (and retaining) the best partners for your organization will set the foundation for your channel's success.

Special Thanks to Our Contributors

Steve Farmiloe | Senior Channel Sales Manager, AppSmart ■ Dave Beagle | Head of Channels, Ooma ■ Heather Tenuto | Chief Revenue Officer, Zift Solutions ■ Stuart Skjerven | Channel Programs and Marketing Manager, Mitel ■ Curt Allen | Founding Partner, EagleTEQ ■ Dina Moskowitz | Founder & CEO, SaaSMAX ■ Michelle McBain | VP and President of Global Channel Strategy, JS Group ■ Jim Tennant | Regional Vice President of Channel – West, TalkDesk



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